GOSPEL TRADITION AND SALVATION IN JUSTIN THE GNOSTIC

BY

ROELOF VAN DEN BROEK

SUMMARY: Justin's Gnostic system, as described in Hippolytus, *Refutatio* V, 23-27, deviates in many aspects from those of the great Gnostic teachers of the second century. One of the most interesting features of his doctrine is the idea that the creation of the world and the procreation of human beings preceded the origin of evil and are fundamentally good. Another is the view that Jesus was a prophet, who finally brought the message that should already have been proclaimed by the Jewish prophets. This study focuses on Justin's use of Gospel traditions and the role of Jesus in the process of salvation. An analysis of the allusions to Gospel traditions in the section about Jesus shows that Justin most probably knew the Gospels of Luke and John and borrowed from them what was suitable to his own myth. It is argued that Justin most probably came from a Jewish-Christian background, since his interpretation of Jesus as the last prophet and his positive ideas about the creation and marriage have their closest parallels in Jewish Christianity and some religious groups related to it.

1. *Introduction*

In Book V of his *Refutatio*, Hippolytus describes and refutes four Gnostic systems, which in various ways assume three basic principles of the universe.[1] The Naassenes and the Perates operate with one single but tripartite principle, the Sethians and Justin the Gnostic with three separate principles. The reports on these Gnostics belong to Hippolytus' 'Sondergut', which comprises a great deal of his anti-Gnostic polemics.[2] An intriguing

[1] In the following I use the edition by M. Marcovich, *Hippolytus. Refutatio* (PTS, 25), Berlin 1986.

[2] Apart from the four systems of book V, the 'Sondergut' comprises VI, 9-18 (Apophasis Megale), 29-37 (Valentinians), VII, 20-27 (Basilides), VIII, 8-11 (Docetists), 12-15 (Monoimus). According to Abramowski, "Ein gnostischer Logostheologe" (see note 3), 18, the commentary on Aratus in IV, 46-49, also belongs to the 'Sondergut'.

© Koninklijke Brill NV, Leiden, 2003
Also available online – www.brill.nl

Vigiliae Christianae 57, 363-388

feature of this 'Sondergut' is that the systems it describes are characterized by evident parallels with respect to both content and wording, by frequent allegorical interpretations of Greek mythological material and by a much more frequent and variegated use of biblical texts than in the certainly authentic Nag Hammadi documents. The problems posed by this 'Sondergut' still wait their final solution.[3] It has been suggested, and denied as well, that Hippolytus made use of a Gnostic source that already contained the peculiar characteristics of his 'Sondergut'. I, for one, am inclined to agree with this suggestion, since it explains a number of problems in the *Refutatio*, which otherwise cannot be solved satisfactorily. In any case, we cannot be certain that he himself had read all the works from which he is quoting. This problem of Hippolytus' sources should be kept in mind in any discussion of the systems he describes, especially when quotations and explanations of biblical texts are involved.

In *Refutatio* V, 23-27, Hippolytus deals with the Gnostic system of a certain Justin, who is commonly called Justin the Gnostic in order to distinguish him from Justin Martyr, the apologist. Hippolytus, who is our only source, does not say anything about Justin's life or the place and time of his activities, which makes it probable that his source or sources provided him with a description of Justin' system and the rituals of his group only. He says that Justin deludes those who are to be initiated into his mysteries by numerous myths through numerous books (V, 24, 2: διὰ πλειόνων βιβλίων), and that "they", i.e. his followers, explain in their own way the prophetic scriptures through numerous books (V, 27, 5, again: διὰ πλειόνων βιβλίων). He explicitly says that he has used only one of them, called *Baruch*, which Justin himself considered excellent (V, 24, 2: οὔσης, καθὼς <αὐτὸς> νομίζει, ἐνδόξου). Nevertheless, it is by no means certain that all

[3] See J. Frickel, *Die "Apophasis Megale" in Hippolyt's Refutatio: Eine Paraphrase zur Apophasis Simons* (Orientalia Christiana Analecta, 182), Rome 1968, 11-25; K. Koschorke, *Hippolyt's Ketzerbekämpfung und Polemik gegen die Gnostiker. Eine tendenzkritische Untersuchung seiner 'Refutatio omnium haeresium'*, Wiesbaden 1975, 95-101; L. Abramowski, "Ein gnostischer Logostheologe. Umfang und Redaktor des gnostischen Sonderguts in Hippolyts 'Widerlegung aller Häresien'," in Eadem, *Drei christologische Untersuchungen* (Beiheft ZNW, 45), Berlin-New York, 1981, 18-63; Marcovich, *Hippolytus. Refutatio*, 45-51; J. Mansfeld, *Heresiography in Context. Hippolytus'* Elenchos *as a Source for Greek Philosophy* (Philosophia Antiqua, LVI), Leiden 1992, 320-321; W.A. Löhr, *Basilides und seine Schule* (WUNT, 83), Tübingen 1996, 295-323. For some pertinent remarks on the exegesis of Old Testament texts in Hippolytus' 'Sondergut', see P.L. Wansink, *Irenaeus en het Oude Testament. Gnostische en heilshistorische exegese in de tweede eeuw*, Zoetermeer 2000, 173-179.

his information about Justin came from this book only. Except for the exposition of Justin's myth (V, 26, 1-32a), the rest of his report shows a very loose structure. The information about the rituals in Justin's sect is found in V, 24, 1-2 and 27, 1-3, and his exegesis of Greek myths and biblical prophecies in 26, 32b-37 and 27, 4-5a. The oath that the initiates had to swear is quoted three times (V, 23, 2; 24, 1; 27, 1-2). Hippolytus explicitly states, V, 27, 1, that that this oath was recorded in "their most important book (ἐν τῷ πρώτῳ <αὐτῶν> βιβλίῳ), which is entitled *Baruch*". Though he had already mentioned this book twice, he introduces it again at the end of his report. In addition to his reference to the numerous exegetical works of the followers of Justin, he says, V, 27, 5: "Their most highly esteemed book is entitled *Baruch*, in which the reader will come to know the whole exposition of their myth (ὅλην τὴν τοῦ μύθου αὐτῶν διαγωγήν)." This suggests that the book of *Baruch* primarily dealt with Justin's Gnostic myth, in which the angel Baruch plays a prominent part. Hippolytus repeatedly says (V, 23, 2 [twice]; 24, 2; 27, 1) that Justin swore his followers to secrecy before disclosing his mystery. If the book of *Baruch* was a secret book, it possibly began with the oath and then proceeded with a systematic exposition of Justin's myth, which is contained in *Refutatio*, V, 26, 1-32a. As indicated above, the rest of his report lacks this clear structure and is even rather disorderly presented. This might be an indication that Hippolytus also made use of other sources or that he made use of one source on Justin's ideas, which *inter alia* also contained a summary of his myth according to the book of *Baruch*. It is of interest to note that the allegorical interpretations of Greek myths (with one exception, which will be discussed below) and biblical prophecies are all found outside the clearly structured presentation of Justin's myth. These allegorical explanations are characteristic for the whole of Hippolytus' 'Sondergut'. Therefore, it seems possible that Hippolytus drew his information on Justin from the same source that also provided him with that on the other sects of his 'Sondergut'. At the beginning of his report, he even establishes himself a connection between Justin and the other Gnostics he had discussed in Book V. Having sworn his initiates to secrecy, Justin transmitted to them "the mysteries that he had impiously invented, by making use of Greek myths on the one hand and, on the other, of forged books that in some respect display the doctrines of the previously mentioned heresies" (V, 23, 2). Hippolytus then continues by saying (23, 3) that these heretics in various ways deal with one and the same subject and that "they specifically call themselves 'Gnostics', because they alone have swallowed down the amazing knowledge of the

Perfect and Good One (οὗτοι δὲ ἰδίως γνωστικοὺς ἑαυτοὺς ἀποκαλοῦσιν, <ὡσαν> τὴν θαυμασίαν γνῶσιν τοῦ τελείου καὶ ἀγαθοῦ μόνοι καταπεπωκότες)." This suggests that already his source spoke about the authors of the doctrines it described as 'Gnostics'.[4]

Notwithstanding the general agreements Hippolytus observed between these Gnostics, the ideas of Justin are so peculiar that they have attracted much scholarly attention.[5] The present study will focus on Justin's use of Gospel traditions and the role of Jesus in the process of salvation. Of course, these aspects have not completely been overlooked in earlier research, but in my view they deserve a more thorough investigation, which, moreover, can also shed some light on Justin's background. However, for a correct understanding of the position of Jesus in Justin's doctrine of salvation, a discussion of his whole system is indispensable.

2. *Three fundamental principles*

According to Justin, there are three eternal principles (ἀρχαὶ ἀγέννητοι) of the whole universe, called the Good One (ὁ Ἀγαθός), Elohim and Edem. The first two are male, the last one is female. The Good One has foreknowledge of everything, Elohim and Edem are without foreknowledge. They did not know the existence of the Good One and could not foresee

---

[4] According to Hipolytus, the Naassenes in particular called themselves Gnostics, *Refutatio* V, 2; 6, 4; 8, 1 and 29; 11, 1.

[5] E. Haenchen, "Das Buch Baruch. Ein Beitrag zum Problem der christlichen Gnosis," *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 50 (1953) 123-158 (= Idem, *Gott und Mensch. Gesammelte Aufsätze,* Tübingen 1965, 298-334); R.M. Grant, "Gnosis Revisited," *Church History* 23 (1954) 36-45; Idem, "Gnosticism and the Problem of Methodology," in Idem, *After the New Testament*, Philadelphia 1967, 194-207 (an expanded version of "Gnosis Revisited"); M. Simonetti, "Note sul *Libro di Baruch* dello gnostico Giustino," *Vetera Christianorum* 6 (1969) 71-89; Idem, *Testi gnostici cristiani*, Bari 1970, 52-60 (with ample notes); A. Orbe, "La cristología de Justino gnóstico," *Estudios Ecclesiasticos* 47 (1972) 437-457; R. van den Broek, "The Shape of Edem according to Justin the Gnostic," *Vigiliae Christianae* 27 (1973) 35-45 (= Idem, *Studies in Gnosticism and Alexandrian Christianity* [NHMS, 39], Leiden 1996, 131-141); K. Kvideland, "Elohims Himmelfahrt," *Temenos* 10 (1974) 68-78; M. Olender, "Éléments pour une analyse de Priape chez Justin le Gnostique," in M.B. de Boer & T.A. Edridge (eds.), *Hommages à Maarten J. Vermaseren* (EPRO, 68), II, Leiden 1978, 874-897; J. Jacobsen Buckley, "Transcendence and Sexuality in the Book of Baruch," *History of Religions* 24 (1984/85) 328-344 (= Idem, *Female Fault and Fulfilment in Gnosticism*, Chapel Hill and London 1986, 3-19); M. Marcovich, "Justin's *Baruch*: A Showcase of Gnostic Syncretism," in Idem, *Studies in Graeco-Roman Religions and Gnosticism* (Studies in Greek and Roman Religion, 4), Leiden 1988, 93-119.

the consequences of their deeds. The ultimate goal of the Gnostic believer is the ascent to the Good One, who apparently is identical with the unknown supreme God of all Gnostic systems. Elohim is called "The Father of all things created" or simply "the Father". He is said to be unknown and invisible (ἄγνωστος καὶ ἀόρατος). The authenticity of these predicates has been questioned, but since they were not uncommon for the Jewish God and Elohim obviously owes his name and his demiurgic activity to the biblical Creator, they may be authentic.[6] Edem is not only without foreknowledge, but she is also irascible, double-minded and double-bodied (ὀργίλη, δίγνωμος, δίσωμος). She apparently owes her name to the land of Eden where God planted Paradise (Gen. 2, 8 LXX: Ἐδέμ). She is also called 'Israel' (V, 26, 37) and 'Earth' (Γῆ; V, 26, 7; 9; 36), which suggest a connection with Hebrew *'adamah*, 'earth' as well. She is double-bodied because she is a μιξοπάρθενος, a virgin above her groin and a viper below. According to Hippolytus (V, 24, 3-25, 4), Justin derived this element from the description of the Scythian Echidna in Herodotus, *Hist.*, IV, 8-10. It seems more likely, however, that the Egyptian Isis-Thermouthis served as the prototype for Justin's Edem.[7]

3. *The good creation*

Compared with other Gnostic systems, one of the most surprising features of Justin's myth is that the creation of the world and the procreation of human beings are good. That evil came into the world was a tragic event, the inevitable result of an essential characteristic of both Elohim and Edem, their lack of foreknowledge. When Elohim and Edem saw each other, they were seized by sexual desire and from their union sprang twelve paternal and twelve maternal angels, who served their father and mother, respectively.[8] Justin said that these 24 angels together formed Paradise, for that was meant when Moses wrote: "Elohim planted a Paradise in Edem" (Gen. 2, 8). Accordingly, the angels were called trees, and Elohim's third

---

[6] So Marcovich, "Justin's Baruch," 40.

[7] As I argued long ago (see note 5), also because of other correspondences between Edem and Isis-Thermouthis. Marcovich, "Justin's Baruch," 97, preferred the Echidna of Hesiod's *Theogony*, 297-299, for reasons that do not convince me. The question can be left aside here, since it is not important in this connection.

[8] The names of these angels all derive from the Old Testament or from Jewish apocryphal literature; see Grant, "Gnosticsm and the Problem of Methodology," 201-202.

angel, Baruch (Hebr.: "the Blessed One"), was identified with the Tree of Life, and Edem's third angel, Naas (Hebr.: "Snake"), with the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. Thereupon, the angels of Elohim took some of the most excellent earth, that is from the upper, anthropoid parts of Edem, and created man (the animals and other living beings were created from her animal parts). Man, Adam, received his spirit (πνεῦμα) from Elohim and his soul (ψυχή) from Edem, and the same happened to Eve after her creation.[9] This is, of course, inspired by Gen. 2, 7: καὶ (θεὸς) ἐνεφύσησεν εἰς τὸ πρόσωπον αὐτοῦ πνοὴν ζωῆς, καὶ ἐγένετο ὁ ἄνθρωπος εἰς ψυχὴν ζῶσαν. The substitution of πνεῦμα for πνοή is interesting, for it is typically Gnostic to say that Adam became a living being at the moment that the Demiurge blew the πνεῦμα into his nostrils. However, in Justin the situation is quite different: the spirit is not unknowingly inspired by the bad Demiurge, as in most Gnostic myths, but it is consciously and intentionally given by the good Creator. Moreover, there is no indication whatsoever that Elohim's gift of the spirit was necessary because his angels were unable to raise Adam's lifeless body.[10] Therefore, it is quite possible that Justin was not directly influenced by the more common Gnostic view of the creation of man, such as found in the *Apocryphon of John*, but by a specific tradition, which read in Gen. 2, 7 πνεῦμα for πνοή. Philo of Alexandria might be polemizing against this interpretation, when he writes, *Legum Allegoriae*, I, 42: "He (Moses) uses the word "breath" (πνοήν), but not "spirit" (πνεῦμα), thus implying that there is a difference between them".[11]

---

[9] Orbe. "Cristología," 442, compared this with Tatian's doctrine of spirit and soul in *Oratio ad Graecos*, 13, but the resemblance is only superficial. For the background of Tatian's ideas, see M. Elze, *Tatian und seine Theologie*, Göttingen 1960, 88-91.

[10] For the Gnostic mythologoumenon of the incapability of the angels to awaken the body of Adam and the unintentional gift of the spirit by the Demiurge, see e.g. *Apocryphon of John*, NHC II, 19, 13-33 parr. = *Synopsis* 51, 4-52, 17 (M. Waldstein & F. Wisse (ed.), *The Apocryphon of John. Synopsis of Nag Hammadi Codices II, 1; III, 1; and IV, 1 with BG 8502, 2* (NHMS, XXXIII), Leiden 1995, 112-115).

[11] F.H. Colson & G.H. Whitaker (eds.), *Philo*, I, London-Cambridge (Mass.) 1929 (reprinted 1971), 172. Here Philo answers the question raised in I, 33-34: "Why, though he (Moses) shows his knowledge of the word 'spirit' when he says 'and the Spirit of God was borne above the water' (Gen. 1, 2), he now (in Gen. 2, 7) says 'breath', not 'spirit'." For the history of the tripartite structure of man (matter, soul, spirit), see G. Quispel, "Hermes Trismegistus and the Origins of Gnosticism," in R. van den Broek & C. van Heertum (eds.), *From Poimandres to Jacob Böhme: Gnosis, Hermetism and the Christian Tradition*, Amsterdam 2000, 145-165 (revised version of the article published in *Vigiliae Christianae* 46 (1992) 1-19).

Justin had a positive view of marital love and procreation, V, 26,8: "Man (ὁ ἄνθρωπος) became a kind of seal and memorial of the love of Elohim and Edem and an eternal symbol of their marriage" (V, 26, 7-9). Adam and Eve were commanded: "Be fruitful and multiply and inherit the earth, i.e. Edem" (cf. Gen. 1, 28), to which Hippolytus adds: "for so he wishes that it had been written".[12] Every human marriage is an image of the archetypal marriage of Elohim and Edem, i.e. of Heaven and Earth.

4. *The origin of evil*

Having created the world, "as a result of their joint pleasure" (ἐκ κοινῆς εὐαρεστήσεως, V, 26, 14), Elohim ascended with his angels to the highest parts of heaven in order to see whether there was any deficiency in his creation.[13] This ascent was in accordance with his nature, which was to mount aloft (ἀνωφερής); Edem, by nature being earth, could not follow him. When he came to the highest part of heaven, Elohim saw a light superior to that which he himself had created, and he exclaimed: "Open me the gates, that I may enter and acknowledge the Lord (cf. Psalm 117, 19 [LXX]), for I considered myself to be Lord."[14] A voice came from the light, saying: "This is the gate of the Lord, the righteous enter through it" (Psalm 117, 20 [LXX]).[15] The Father entered, without his angels, and approached the Good One. He saw what "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard,

---

[12] For an explanation of the substitution of κατακληρονομήσατε for the biblical πληρώσατε, see Marcovich, "Justin's Baruch," 100.

[13] Kvideland, "Elohims Himmelfahrt," 71, relates this with Gen. 1, 31 ("and God saw all that he had made, and it was very good") and the rest of God from all his work on the seventh day (Gen. 2, 2), which might be possible. But her thesis that the ascent of Elohim has to be wholly interpreted in the light of Jewish and Gnostic speculations about the Sabbath-rest, which took their origin in Gen. 2, 2-3, isolates this element too much from the context of Justin's myth.

[14] Simonetti, "Note sul *Libro di Baruch*," 80, has rightly pointed out that Elohim does not boast "I am the Lord, there is no other" (Isaiah 45, 5), as the Gnostic Demiurge usually does, but that he in all modesty observes that he is not the supreme Lord.

[15] Marcovich, "Justin's Baruch," 103, thinks the term δίκαιοι, "the just ones", is significant here: "I think it is significant to know that Elohim is *just*. For this squares with the Gnostic distinction between the supreme Good God, and the Jewish Demiurge, who is only God of Law, retribution and justice." Marcovich, whose qualifications, by the way, better pertain to the Marcionite than the Gnostic Demiurge, seems to overstretch the meaning of δίκαιοι here. Nothing in Justin's myth suggests that he considered Elohim on the same level as the Gnostic Demiurge.

neither has entered into the heart of man".[16] Then the Good One said to him: "Sit on my right hand" (Psalm 109, 1 [LXX]). Probably before, and not after, this enthronement, Elohim had to swear not to reveal anything he had seen and to undergo a special kind of baptism, which both were to be repeated by Justin's followers. Justin found a reference to this oath of secrecy in Psalm 109, 4: "The Lord has sworn."[17] Now he has seen the glory of the Good One, Elohim regrets to have made the world, because at that time he did not know that there was a far better world, and he entreats the Good One, V, 27, 17: "Allow me, Lord, to destroy the world that I have created. For my spirit (πνεῦμα) has been bound up with men, and I want to recover it (καὶ θέλω αὐτὸ ἀπολαβεῖν)." Here Elohim expresses the same consideration as the biblical Creator before the Flood, in Gen. 6, 3: Οὐ μὴ καταμείνῃ τὸ πνεῦμά μου ἐν τοῖς ἀνθρώποις τούτοις εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα διὰ τὸ εἶναι αὐτοὺς σάρκας. But the Good One rejects his request, since in his presence no evil can be done, and commands Elohim to stay with him in heaven and to leave the world to Edem, as long as she wishes.

When Edem realised that Elohim would not return, she became angry and commanded her first angel, Babel, i.e. Venus, to cause adultery and dissolution of marriages among men, so that they might undergo the same suffering she endured from Elohim's departure. She also ordered Naas, her third angel, to chastise the spirit of man, so that Elohim might be punished through the suffering of the spirit he had given. Thereupon Elohim sent his third angel, Baruch, to rescue his spirit in man. Baruch stood in the midst of the trees of Paradise, that is of the angels, and forbade Adam and Eve to eat from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, i.e. Naas. But Baruch was not successful. On the contrary, Naas seduced Eve and also had a homosexual relationship with Adam (V, 26, 19-23). In Justin's view, Edem apparently was not the principle of evil from the beginning; she became angry after Elohim had left her, since she was "irascible and double-minded" and as such was able to decline to evil. The origin of evil was ultimately due to the fact that both Elohim and Edem were without foreknowledge, so that Elohim could not foresee that he would encounter

[16] This looks like a direct quotation of 1 Cor. 2, 9, but we cannot be sure, for this saying was rather widespread; see K. Berger, "Zur Diskussion über die Herkunft von 1 Kor. ii. 9," *New Testament Studies* 24 (1977/8) 270-283.

[17] For the three versions of the oath, see Marcovich, "Justin's Baruch," 103-105. That in Psalm 109 the sitting at the right hand of the Lord (vs. 1) precedes the oath of the Lord (vs. 4), seems to have conditioned the sequence of these events in the myth.

the Good One and what was to happen when he did not return to Edem. As a matter of fact, Justin laid the whole burden of the origin of evil on Elohim. After the remark that as a result of Naas' abuse of Adam and Eve "adultery and homosexuality have arisen," the book of Baruch continued, according to Hippolytus, V, 26, 23-24: "From then on evil and good dominated the human beings,[18] sprung from one single source—that of the Father. For by ascending to the Good One the Father pointed out the way for those who want to ascend, but by his departure from Edem he made the beginning of evil for the spirit that is in men."

5. *The History of Salvation before Jesus*

After Baruch's failure to prevent Adam and Eve from eating the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, Elohim continued his efforts to rescue his spirit from the world of Edem. But for a long time his attempts at salvation turned out to be unsuccessful.[19] He sent Baruch to Moses and through him spoke to the Israelites to convert them to the Good One. But Naas, through the soul that had come upon Moses from Edem, obscured the precepts of Baruch and made those of himself heard. "For this reason, the soul is arrayed against the spirit, and the spirit against the soul (cf. Gal. 5, 16-17). For the soul is Edem, but the spirit is Elohim, and each of these exist in all human beings, both females and males" (V, 26.19-24; X, 15, 5). Later on, Baruch was sent to the prophets, in order that through them the spirit in men might listen and flee Edem and the evil mould (τὴν πλάσιν τὴν πονηράν, V, 26, 26), just as Father Elohim had done. But Naas beguiled the prophets and all of them were seduced and they did not follow the words of Baruch that Elohim had enjoined. Finally, Elohim chose a pagan prophet (ἐξ ἀκροβυστίας προφήτην, V, 26, 27),[20] Heracles, and commanded

---

[18] At this point, Marcovich has tried to emend the traditional text (Edition, 205, line 115): ἀπὸ τότε <τε> ἐπεκράτησε τὰ κακὰ τοῖς ἀνθρώποις καὶ <κεχώρηκε> τὰ ἀγαθά, "and from then on evil dominated the human beings and good was drawn away." But this is not an emendation at all, for the following sentence explicitly gives the reason (γάρ) why Elohim was the ultimate cause of both good and evil.

[19] With an allusion to the term 'Heilsgeschichte', Haenchen, "Das Buch Baruch," 327, aptly called the period between Adam and Jesus an 'Unheilsgeschichte'.

[20] The word ἀκροβυστία is used in its Pauline meaning of 'paganism'; cf. Haenchen, "Das Buch Baruch," 310 (10): "In der LXX wird es nur in anderem Sinn verwendet. Im NT bezeichnet es das Heidentum nur im paulinischen Schrifttum. Von dort dürfte es hier übernommen sein." However, a direct Pauline influence does not seem necessary.

him to overpower the twelve angels of Edem and to free the spirit of the Father. Heracles obeyed and accomplished his twelve Labours, but his work was made fruitless when he became a victim of the charms of Omphale, who was no other than Babel or Aphrodite, Edem's first angel. She beguiled him and deprived him of his power.[21]

There are good reasons to assume that the episode of Heracles originally did not belong to Justin's myth: 1. it comes rather unexpectedly after a course of events that completely remains within the framework of the Hebrew bible; 2. Baruch does not play his usual role of Elohim's messenger but Heracles is selected directly by Elohim; 3. though Heracles is called 'a prophet', the character of his mission is quite different from that of Moses, the Old Testament prophets, and Jesus, who comes after him. They all bring Elohim's message in a peaceful way by preaching the good news about the Good One, Heracles does it by the use of force;[22] 4. the sections on Heracles and on Jesus both begin with the word "finally" (τὸ δὲ τελευταῖον), though it is only appropriate in the latter case. One gets the impression that the section on Heracles, rather awkwardly, was inserted after the "finally" that introduced the story of Jesus and that the redactor repeated this word when he continued the original text.[23] It is inconceivable that Hippolytus himself inserted the mission of Heracles, or that it is due to an anti-Gnostic Christian who made a compilation of Gnostic systems in order to refute them. If the Heracles episode originally did not belong to Justin's *Baruch*, it must have been inserted by a later Christian *Gnostic* author, who liked to emphasize that, to demonstrate the truth of the Gnostic speculations, Greek mythology was of no less importance than the Bible.[24]

According to G.W.H. Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon*, Oxford 1961, 66a, who translates ἀκροβυστία here as "uncircumcised people", it was frequently used in this meaning, just as ἀκρόβυστος could simply mean "gentile".

[21] See for the whole section on Heracles, Marcovich, "Justin's Baruch," 110-112.

[22] The difference was rightly pointed out by Marcovich, "Justin's Baruch," 110: "Since three *peaceful* attempts by Baruch to free Elohim's spirit from Edem have failed, Father Elohim now decides to employ sheer *force*." In his discussion of the episode of Heracles, Marcovich does not question its originality, but at the end of his study he says in a passing remark, 114: "Heracles looks rather as an *additional episode*" (his italics).

[23] First pointed out by Haenchen, "Das Buch Baruch," 305, note 1.

[24] This might be an indication that the whole of Hippolytus' 'Sondergut', with its predilection for allegorical interpretations of Greek myths, derives from a *Gnostic* compilation of Gnostic systems. The same phenomenon can be observed in the *Treatise on the Soul* (NHC II, 6), of which "the use of biblical as well as of Homeric references

After the section on Jesus, Hippolytus' report continues with other allegorical interpretations of Greek myths: the fertility god Priapus is a representation of the Good One; the myths of Leda and the swan, and Danaë and the shower of gold, refer to Edem and Elohim; the eagle and Ganymedes represent Naas and Adam. Immediately after these references to Greek myths, the text rather unexpectedly continues with an exegesis of Isaiah 1, 2 (V, 26, 36): "Hear, heaven, and give ear, earth; the Lord has spoken" (ἄκουε, οὐρανέ, καὶ ἐνωτίζου, ἡ γῆ· κύριος ἐλάλησεν).[25] Here "heaven" refers to Elohim's spirit in man, "earth" to the soul, and "Lord" to Baruch. In Isaiah 1, 3: "Israel does not know me", "Israel" is Edem and "me" refers to Elohim: "For if she had known that I am with the Good One, she would not have punished my spirit, which is bound to men because of paternal ignorance" (V, 26, 37). The oath sworn by Elohim at the revelation of the mysteries of the Good One is indicated by Psalm 109, 4 (LXX): "The Lord has sworn and will not repent" (V, 24, 1; 27, 1). Immediately after the description of the baptism practised in Justin's sect, Hippolytus adds an exegesis of Hosea 1, 2: "Take a wanton for your wife, for like a wanton the earth has committed fornication away from the Lord." As could be expected, "the earth" refers to Edem. Though Justin himself held the Old Testament prophets in low esteem, as will appear in the next section, these exegeses obviously take it for granted that the truth of Justin's myth is still to be found in the Hebrew bible.

6. *Justin's view of Jesus*

After Baruch's failed missions to Adam, Moses, and the prophets, Elohim makes a last and now successful attempt to rescue his spirit in man. Hippolytus reports, *Refutatio*, V, 26, 29-32a:

> 29. Finally, in the days of king Herod, Baruch was sent, once again sent down by Elohim, and coming to Nazareth he found Jesus, the son of Joseph and Mary, a twelve-year-old boy, while he was tending sheep. And he told him everything that had happened from the beginning, from Edem and Elohim

shows that Greek and Jewish wisdom had the same prophetical value for the author" (M. Scopello, in her introduction to this writing in J.M. Robinson (ed.), *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*, 3rd rev. ed., Leiden 1988, 191).

[25] An almost literal quotation of the LXX, which omits the article before γῆ and inserts ὅτι before κύριος.

onwards, and the things that had happened after that.[26] 30. And he said: "All the prophets before you have been seduced. Try then, Jesus, son of man, not to be seduced, but proclaim this message to men and tell them about the Father and the Good One, and ascend to the Good One and sit there with Elohim, the Father of us all." 31. And Jesus obeyed the angel and said: "Lord, I shall do everything." And he proclaimed the message. Naas, then, wanted to seduce this one too, but he was unable to do so, for Jesus remained faithful to Baruch. Enraged that he was unable to seduce him, Naas caused him to be crucified. But he left the body of Edem behind on the cross and ascended to the Good One. 32. For he said to Edem: "Woman, you have your son", i.e. the psychic and the earthly man, and he himself commended his spirit into the hands of the Father and ascended to the Good One.

7. *Five allusions to Gospel texts and one direct quotation*

a. Baruch came to Jesus "in the days of King Herod" (ἐν ταῖς ἡμέραις Ἡρώδου τοῦ βασιλέως). This might be a quotation of Matth. 2, 1 or Luke 1, 5, though these texts show slight differences with that of Justin/Hippolytus: Matthew reads ἐν ἡμέραις . . ., and Luke . . . Ἡρῴδου βασιλέως τῆς Ἰουδαίας.[27] In the latter case, however, many witnesses insert the article τοῦ before βασιλέως (ACDΘ et al.). According to Epiphanius, *Panarion* 30, 13, 6 and 14, 3, the *Gospel of the Ebionites* began with the words: ἐγένετο ἐν ταῖς ἡμεραις Ἡρῴδου βασιλέως τῆς Ἰουδαίας, which agrees with Luke.[28] It should be observed, however, that the *Gospel of the Ebionites* does not speak about the

[26] The Greek of our only textual witness, Parisinus suppl. gr. 464 (P) is rather awkward at this point. Therefore, Marcovich, 207, line 152-154, has emended the text in this way: καὶ ἀναγγέλλει αὐτῷ πάντα ὅσα ἀπ' ἀρχῆς (P and Wendland read here: αὐτῷ ἀπ' ἀρχῆς πάντα ὅσα) ἐγένετο, <τουτέστιν> ἀπὸ τῆς Ἐδὲμ καὶ τοῦ Ἐλοειμ <καὶ τοῦ Ἀγαθοῦ, καὶ τὰ> μετὰ ταῦτα γενόμενα (P and Wendland: ἐσόμενα). Since Elohim and Edem are the main characters in Justin's myth of the origin of evil, the addition of the Good One seems superfluous. Marcovich, "Justin's Baruch," 113, interprets this passage as "Baruch illuminates Jesus by revealing to him the Gnostic Gospel about the Good One, Elohim and Edem, and about the creation." It seems more probable, however, that the message was about the origin of evil as a result of Edem's and Elohim's separation (Edem is intentionally mentioned first) and Elohim's failed attempts to rescue his spirit through Moses and the prophets (therefore, Marcovich's proposal to read γενόμενα in stead of ἐσόμενα, seems justified).

[27] The Greek NT is cited after *The Greek New Testament*, 4th rev. ed., 5th printing Stuttgart 2001, which has the same text as Nestle-Aland, *Novum Testamentum Graece*, rev. 27th ed., Stuttgart 1993.

[28] A.F.J. Klijn (ed.), *Jewish-Christian Gospel Tradition* (Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae, XVII), Leiden 1992, 68-70 (fragm. VIII).

time of Jesus' birth but of that of his baptism. Justin does not speak about Jesus' birth either, but about his vocation at the age of twelve. A similar expression occurs in Hippolytus' report on the Perates, *Refutatio* V, 16, 10: they said that the serpent had revealed itself in human form "in the times of Herod" (ἐν τοῖς χρόνοις Ἡρώδου). It is impossible to decide whether Hippolytus gives an exact or a rather free quotation of Justin's text, and, therefore, it is equally impossible to say whether Justin used a specific Gospel, quoted from memory, or drew on oral Gospel traditions. If he used one, it probably was the Gospel of Luke, since he seems to allude to at least two other Lucan texts too.

b. In Nazareth, Baruch "found Jesus, the son of Joseph and Mary, a twelve-year-old boy, while he was tending sheep" (εὗρε τὸν Ἰησοῦν, υἱὸν τοῦ Ἰωσὴφ καὶ Μαρίας, βόσκοντα πρόβατα παιδάριον δυωδεκαετές). It is only in the Gospel of Luke that we encounter Jesus as a twelve-year-old boy (2, 42), who lives in Nazareth (2, 39 and 51), but what Justin has to say about him has nothing to do with the story in Luke. Apart from Jesus' age and Nazareth, the only correspondence between Luke 2, 41-52 and Justin's *Baruch* is that, in both texts Joseph and Mary are called his father and mother (cf. Luke 2, 43: οἱ γονεῖς αὐτοῦ, and Mary's exclamation in 2, 48: ἰδοὺ ὁ πατήρ σου κἀγὼ ὀδυνώμενοι ἐζητοῦμέν σε). It has been argued that Justin spoke about Jesus' parents in the same innocent way as Luke did, without any implicit denial of the virginal birth as described in Luke 1 and 2.[29] However, if Justin knew the Lucan stories about Jesus' birth, he might have rejected them. For him, the first important event of Jesus' life apparently was that he, as the natural son of Joseph and Mary, at his twelfth year was selected by Elohim to proclaim the Gospel about the Good One. When Jesus is addressed as "son of man" (υἱὲ ἀνθρώπου), the term may contain an explicit opposition to the idea of a supernatural birth.[30]

That Jesus was called to his mission and started to prophesy at the age of twelve apparently has some connection with the Lucan story of Jesus'

---

[29] Orbe, "Cristología," 438-439.

[30] The term is strongly reminiscent of the biblical expression ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, which in the second century was interpreted as indicating the human aspect of Jesus; cf. e.g. Ignatius, *Ephesians*, 20, 2; *Barnabas* 12, 10; *Treatise on the Resurrection* (NHC I, 44, 21-26, transl. Peel, *Nag Hammadi Codex I*, vol. I, Leiden 1985, 149): "Now the Son of God, Rheginos, was Son of Man. He embraced them both, possessing the humanity and the divinity." Orbe, "Cristología," 439-441, has argued that according to Justin Jesus was also 'Son of God', i.e. of the Good One. See, however, below, p. 381.

dispute with the rabbis in the temple, which showed that he was "full of wisdom" (2, 40). If Justin really did reject Jesus' supernatural birth, his story of the vocation of Jesus may have served to explain why Jesus was able to show such an amazing intelligence in his answers (2, 47). According to Justin, Jesus consented to his vocation and immediately began to proclaim the Gospel of the Good One. It is not a wild guess to assume that, in Justin's view, he did so at his first public appearance, in the temple. If this is true, Justin must have adhered to a Gnostic interpretation of the story of the twelve-year-old Jesus, which was also known to the Valentinians. According to Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*, I, 20, 2, the Valentinians concluded from Luke 2, 49 (οὐκ ἤδειτε ὅτι ἐν τοῖς τοῦ πατρός μου δεῖ εἶναί με) that Jesus first preached the Unknown Father to his parents in the temple.[31] However, Justin's report has also to be seen in a broader Jewish context, which makes it important that Jesus received his vocation at the age of *bar mitswāh*, when he was expected to fulfill all religious duties. According to Josephus, *Antiq. Jud.*, V, 348, Samuel also began to prophesy at the age of twelve,[32] and Mani received his first revelation at the same age.[33]

The notion that Jesus was tending sheep at the moment of his vocation is completely singular.[34] Most commentators simply refer to John 10, 11

---

[31] Marcovich, "Justin's Baruch," 113, who refers to this text without further discussion, seems to interpret Jesus' coming of age in the same way as it is done in *Adv. Haer.* I, 3, 2 (Ptolemy), where it is "a manifestation of the Dodecad of Aeons".

[32] According to Ps.-Philo, *Antiquitates biblicae*, 53, 1, however, Samuel received his revelation when he was only eight years old; cf. L. Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews*, VI, Philadelphia 1959 (4th impr. of the 1928 edition), 226 (Ps.-Philo) and 227 (Josephus).

[33] Because of the fragmentary status of the beginning of the manuscript, it remains unclear whether or not the Cologne Mani-Codex contained this information; see *int. al.* J. van Oort, *Mani, Manichaeism and Augustine, The Rediscovery of Manichaeism and its Influence on Western Christianity*, Tbilisi, 1996, 12. However, it is clearly mentioned in *Kephalaia* I, 14, 30-32 (see I. Gardner, *The Kephalaia of the Teacher. The Edited Coptic Manichaean Texts in Translation with Commentary* (NHMS XXXVII), Leiden 1995, 20) and in Arabic sources, e.g. the *Fihrist* of al-Nadim (see B. Dodge, *The Fihrist of al-Nadim. A Tenth-Century Survey of Muslim Culture*, Vol. II, New York-London 1970, 774).

[34] According to Mark, 6, 3, Jesus was thought to work as a carpenter, which was developed further by Justin, *Dialogue with Trypho*, 88, 8 ("making ploughs and yokes"), but denied by Origen, *Contra Celsum*, VI, 34 and 36 (see B.M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 2nd ed., 3rd. printing, Stuttgart 2000, 75-76). The Infancy Gospels relate that already as a boy Jesus assisted his father, *Gospel of Thomas*, 13, and *Gospel of Ps.-Matthew*, 37. See on Jesus' earthly profession W. Bauer, *Das Leben Jesu im Zeitalter der neutestamentlichen Apokryphen*, Tübingen 1909 (reprinted Darmstadt 1967), 314-315. A peculiar story in the *Pistis Sophia*, I, 61 (C. Schmidt & V. MacDermot (eds.)

("I am the good shepherd"), without any further explanation.[35] It might be argued that Jesus became the Good Shepherd when he accepted to fulfil his mission and began to preach the Gospel of the Good One. But that does not explain why Justin said that Jesus was actually herding sheep at the moment that Baruch appeared to him. Moses and David, whom Jews and Christians considered a prophet,[36] had been tending sheep when they were unexpectedly called to be the shepherds of their people. In Jewish sources, Moses is often called the "faithful shepherd".[37] It is conceivable that Justin, in view of these famous shepherd-prophets, concluded from the well-known Johannine metaphor that Jesus also had been a shepherd by profession before he became a prophet.

c. Baruch says to Jesus: "All the prophets before you have been seduced (πάντες οἱ πρὸ σοῦ προφῆται ὑπεσύρησαν)." This is generally seen as an allusion to John 10, 8: πάντες ὅσοι ἦλθον πρὸ ἐμοῦ[38] κλέπται εἰσὶν καὶ λῃσταί. At first sight this might seem a rather far-fetched suggestion, but the same connection is found in Hippolytus' discussion of the Valentinians. In VI, 35, 1, he ascribes to Valentinus the following statement: "All the prophets and the law have spoken on account of the Demiurge (πάντες οὖν οἱ προφῆται καὶ ὁ νόμος ἐλάλησαν ἀπὸ τοῦ δημιουργοῦ), the foolish god, being fools themselves, who know nothing. Therefore the Lord says: 'All that came before me are thieves and robbers', and the Apostle: 'the mystery that was not made known to earlier generations' (Eph. 3, 4-5)." Of course, there are considerable differences between the views of the Valentinians and Justin, of which the most important is that according to Justin the Demiurge, Elohim, was not a foolish god, but one whose message of salvation to earlier generations was made ineffective by Naas. Nevertheless, it seems justified to hear in Justin's πάντες οἱ πρὸ σοῦ προφῆται an echo of the πάντες ὅσοι

Pistis Sophia, Leiden 1978, 121), says that as a young boy Jesus was in the vineyard with Joseph when the divine Spirit came down to him.

[35] See already Bauer, *Leben Jesu*, 315: "Zwar, wenn die Darstellung als Hirt für ihn in Aufnahme gekommen ist, so hat das seinen Grund nicht im Nachdenken über den Stand, dem er auf Erden angehörte, sondern in Joh. 10, 11"; Haenchen, "Das Buch Baruch," 316: "daß Jesus der gute Hirte ist, genügt zur Erklärung des scheinbar so konkreten Züges."

[36] According to Jewish sources, David also began to prophesy when he still was a youth; see Ginzberg, *Legends*, VI, 249, n. 23.

[37] Ginzberg, *Legends*, II, 300; V, 414, n. 109

[38] The words πρὸ ἐμοῦ might be an early addition; see Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 195-196.

ἦλθον πρὸ ἐμοῦ of John 10, 8. The view that John's "all that came before me" referred to the prophets was also known to Clement of Alexandria, probably from Gnostic sources. But, of course, he could not accept this, for "the prophets, sent and inspired by the Lord, are not thieves but servants" (*Stromateis* I, 81, 1). The real robber and thief is the devil, who mixed false prophets under the true ones; and, therefore, "all that were before the Lord" does not refer to all human beings "but to all false prophets and all that were not explicitly sent by him"[39] (*Strom.* I, 84, 6-7).

On the basis of this rather vague allusion to John 10, 8, it could be argued that Justin knew the Gospel of John. But there is no absolute certainty about that. In the first place, without a personal knowledge of John's gospel, he could have used a well known proof-text for the Gnostic view that before Jesus the supreme God had been completely unknown. In the second place it should be realized that the sections about the Valentinians and Justin both belong to Hippolytus' 'Sondergut', in which often the same biblical texts are quoted in support of quite different Gnostic ideas. To mention only one other example: Ephesians 3, 4-5, is said to have been used by Valentinus to prove that before Jesus the unknown God was completely unknown (V, 35, 1, quoted above), but also by Basilides, not only to demonstrate that the "Great Ruler" erroneously thought he was the only god, but also that the divine mystery finally will be revealed to the sonship in our human ἀμορφία (VII, 25, 3 and 26, 7, respectively). This use of the same texts in support of various Gnostic views should make us suspicious about their occurrence in the original systems. It seems more likely that these proofs from Scripture are due to a Gnostic compiler, whose work formed the basis of Hippolytus' 'Sondergut'. Therefore, if John 10, 8 really forms the background of Baruch's words: "All the prophets before you have been seduced", it may be doubted whether this allusion was already found in the original version of Justin's *Baruch*. In any case, Baruch's words show that Justin did not attach much importance to the Hebrew prophets.

d. Justin's story of the crucifixion is adapted to his myth, but it shows several elements which seem derived from the canonical gospels. Because he was unable to beguile Jesus, Naas caused him to be crucified. But even that did not work: Jesus "left the body of Edem behind on the cross and ascended to the Good One. For he said to Edem: 'Woman, you have your

[39] The last category refers to the Greek philosophers, cf. *Strom.* II, 1,1.

son', i.e. the psychic and the earthly man (γύναι, ἀπέχεις σου τὸν υἱόν, τουτέστιν τὸν ψυχικὸν ἄνθρωπον καὶ τὸν χοϊκόν)." All critics unanimously assume that we have here a free quotation of John 19, 26: γύναι, ἴδε ὁ υἱός σου, and, indeed, there is little reason to doubt it. But this saying of Jesus to his mother is completely taken out of its Johannine context: the addressed woman is Edem and her son is the psychic and material aspects of Jesus, that is to say, the elements that Edem had contributed to the creation of man. As in so many other Gnostic systems, only the spirit is saved, the soul and the body are bound to perdition. As far as I know, there is no parallel to Justin's exegesis of "your son" in John 19, 26.

e. Leaving behind his body and soul, "Jesus himself commended his spirit into the hands of the Father and ascended to the Good One (αὐτὸς δὲ εἰς χεῖρας παραθέμενος τοῦ πατρὸς τὸ πνεῦμα, ἀνῆλθε πρὸς τὸν ἀγαθόν)." There is no doubt that we have here a clear allusion to Luke 23, 46: Πάτερ, εἰς χεῖράς σου παρατίθεμαι τὸ πνεῦμά μου, but it is not certain how Justin interpreted it. I shall come back to this question in due course. Here it may suffice to say that in my view it simply means that Jesus brought his spirit back to Elohim and by doing so came into the presence of the Good One.

f. Outside the section on Jesus, there is, in V, 27, 2, one other passage that contains a clear reference to the Gospel of John. The initiate who has come to the Good One sees "what eye has not seen, . . . and drinks from the living water, which is to them, as they hold, a bath, a well of bubbling living water" (καὶ πίνει ἀπὸ "τοῦ ζῶντος ὕδατος", ὅπερ ἐστὶ λουτρὸν αὐτοῖς, ὡς νομίζουσι, "πηγὴ ζῶντος ὕδατος ἁλλομένου"). Marcovich and many others take the words between quotation-marks as quotations of John 4, 10 (ὕδωρ ζῶν) and 14 (πηγὴ ὕδατος ἁλλομένου εἰς ζωὴν αἰώνιον), respectively. In itself, the first instance might be doubted, since the term 'living (= streaming *and* life-giving) water' was often used in a ritual context of lustration or baptism, without any direct reference to John 4, 10.[40] There can be no doubt, however, that in the second instance John 4, 14 is cited. In fact, it is the only direct and literal quotation of a Gospel text in the whole of Hippolytus' report on Justin's *Baruch*. But here the question may be asked whether this quotation of the Gospel of John goes back to Justin himself or is due to a later author, the compiler of the 'Sondergut' or

[40] See e.g. *Didache*, 7, 1; for the Jewish background, cf. K. Niederwimmer, *Die Didache* (Kommentar zu den Apostolischen Vätern, 1), Göttingen 1989, 161.

Hippolytus himself. The latter possibility seems the most preferable, for the same reference to a combination of John 4, 10 and 14, is also found in Hippolytus' sections on the Naassenes and the Sethians. In both cases, the correspondence goes even further. Both Justin and the Naassenes are said to have applied John 4, 10 and 14 to the water above the firmament that is called "living, bubbling water" (V, 9, 18: ζῶν ὕδωρ ἀλλόμενον). And the Sethians said that the Saviour, after the completion of his incarnation—just as Elohim after his ascent to the Good One—, was cleansed and drank the cup of living, bubbling water (ἀπελούσατο καὶ ἔπιε τὸ ποτήριον ζῶντος ὕδατος ἁλλομένον). Just as in Justin, everybody who wants "to lay down the shape of a servant and to put on the heavenly garment" has to drink from this cup (V, 19, 21). In view of these parallels, it seems unlikely that the literal quotation of John 4, 14 were already to be found in the original version of Justin's *Baruch*.

8. *Justin's knowledge of Gospel traditions*

How should we assess the evidence presented above? Apart from the "well of bubbling living water" (John 4, 14), there are no direct Gospel quotations but only allusions to the story of Jesus as found in the Gospels of Luke and John. This shows that, if Justin had a direct knowledge of the now canonical Gospels, he at least knew those of Luke and John. The phrase "in the days of King Herod" is too general to be taken as proof of Justin's knowledge of Luke. However, as pointed out above, there are good reasons to suppose that he knew the Lucan story about the boy Jesus in the temple and its Gnostic interpretation. This may have influenced him to have Jesus called to his mission immediately before the journey to Jerusalem, so that his appearance in the temple was the beginning of his proclamation of the Gospel. In other words, his story of the vocation of Jesus presupposes *and* explains Luke 2, 41-52. He apparently felt himself completely free to make use of various Gospel traditions to make his own myth.

That Jesus was tending sheep at the moment of his vocation may have been influenced by the well-known image of Jesus as the Good Shepherd, which, in itself, does not necessarily point to a direct knowledge of the Gospel of John (10, 11). It was part of the general Christian imagery, as is abundantly shown by early Christian art. As we have seen, the tradition that such great prophets as Moses and David were shepherds when they were called to prophesy may have played a role as well. Direct influence of the

Gospel of John cannot be ascertained either with respect to Justin's judgement of the prophets: "All the prophets before you have been seduced." We have seen that there were Gnostics who made use of John 10, 8 to underpin their view that the Jewish prophets had been the mouthpiece of the Demiurge and that, therefore, their prophecies had been false. So Justin's judgement may ultimately be an echo of John 10, 8, but a direct influence seems less likely. Moreover, there is also the possibility of a Jewish Christian influence, which will be discussed below.

There can be no doubt, however, about the combination of Lucan and Johannine traditions in Justin's story of the crucifixion. The words to Edem: "Woman, you have your son", clearly reflect those to Mary in John 19, 27: "Woman, behold your son". And that Jesus commended his spirit into the hands of the Father (Elohim) corresponds to Luke 23, 46: "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit." Though it is conceivable that Justin used a now lost Gospel which contained both words of Jesus, it seems more reasonable to assume that he knew the Gospels of Luke and John and borrowed from them what was suitable to his own myth.

9. *Christology*

In Hippolytus' summary of the book of *Baruch*, there is no indication whatsoever that Justin ascribed to Jesus a divine origin. He is the natural son of Joseph and Mary and, just as all other human beings, his personality consists of a body and a soul, which come from Edem, and a spirit, which comes form Elohim. Antonio Orbe, however, has challenged this view. According to him, the earthly person of Jesus exclusively possessed four constitutive elements: body, soul, spirit, and his real self, which in fact was his divinity. Justin's doctrine would have been that at the cross Jesus gave his spirit back to Elohim, who apparently now held a lower position, and that his real self (αὐτὸς δέ) ascended to the Good One. This could only have been possible if he exclusively and personally was the Son of the Good One.[41] However, this interpretation is very unlikely. Firstly, there is nothing in Justin's myth that suggests that Elohim had been removed

[41] Orbe, "Cristología," 439-441; cf. 440-441: "El fenómeno, exclusivo de Jesús, tiene una sola explicación. El hijo de María es *personalmente* (Orbe's italics) Hijo del Bueno; y no al modo de los pneumáticos valentinianos, sino por privilegio único." He calls the divine element "la persona de Jesús" (440).

from the Good One's presence.[42] Secondly, Hippolytus explicitly states that Justin, by initiating his followers into the mysteries, "brings them to the Good One" (V, 24, 2: καὶ οὕτως ἐπὶ τὸν ἀγαθὸν ἄγει), and also that the initiate who has sworn the initiatory oath, "goes in to the Good One" (V, 27, 2: εἰσέρχεται πρὸς τὸν ἀγαθόν). In his summary of Justin's teachings, Hippolytus explicitly says (*Refutatio* X, 15, 7) that Jesus' spirit ascended to the Good One and that the spirit of Justin's followers will be saved "in the same way" (οὕτως σωθήσεσθαι). As already said above, Justin's view of what happened to Jesus at his death most probably was that he gave his spirit back to Elohim and by doing so came into the presence of the Good One. There is in Hippolytus' report no indication that the fate of Jesus after his death was an exception; on the contrary, it happens to everyone who believes the gospel of the Good One and is initiated into the mysteries. For Justin, Jesus was not a Saviour of divine descent but a normal, though excellent, human being, who was the first to bring his spirit back to Elohim. His death at the cross was not an act of redemption for the benefit of mankind. It was the ultimate example of how to resist the delusions of Naas and to remain faithful to the message of Baruch and to save the spirit of Elohim. Justin's myth left no room for a bodily resurrection or ascension of Jesus, but this had nothing to do with any kind of docetism. The body and soul of all human beings, and so also of Jesus, belong to Edem, i.e. the earth, to which they return at death.

In Justin's view, Jesus was a prophet. Previously, Elohim had sent Baruch to Moses and to the Jewish prophets, but Naas had beguiled them to the effect that "the words of Baruch, which Elohim had enjoined, were not heard" (V, 26, 26). Baruch brought the same message to Jesus, and he was the first prophet who remained faithful to his mission. Jesus did what the Jewish prophets should have done. Though Justin, or at least Hippolytus' summary of his ideas, does not explain why Jesus succeeded where his predecessors had failed,[43] he apparently saw Jesus within the scope of the

[42] Although Marcovich apparently did not know Orbe's article, he interpreted the ascent of Jesus in the same way, "Justin's Baruch," 113-114: "That means that, at the time of Jesus' ascent, Elohim takes his usual position between the highest heaven of the Good One and the earth of Edem. Conceivably, what is left of Jesus' essence is the pure pneumatic substance, which is inexhaustible. Probably Jesus is being seated at the right hand of the Good One."

[43] According to Orbe, however, "Cristología," 446-449, it was because Jesus had been completely filled with the spirit of Elohim at his vocation and had received the Holy Spirit of the Good One at his baptism in the river Jordan. Orbe also assumes two

Jewish religion. The only new but very important aspect of the prophet Jesus was that he finally proclaimed the Gospel of the Good One and personally started the redemption of Elohim's spirit from the world of matter. Justin does not have a Christology in the usual sense of the word; characteristically, he never mentions the name 'Christ' but only speaks of 'Jesus'. His special brand of Christianity was in fact a purified form of the Jewish religion, as it should have been from the beginning.

10. *Justin's background*

Justin remains an elusive figure, but on the basis of his myth at least some conclusions can be drawn about his religious background.[44] The whole of his myth is read into the Hebrew bible, most probably in its Greek form. Jesus, who is considered the last of the Jewish prophets, remains wholly within the context of the Jewish religion. He proclaims the Gospel of the Unknown God, but the same message had also been brought to the Jewish prophets, who, however, had been beguiled by Naas. For a proper evaluation of Justin's position, we have to put his view of the Jewish prophets in a broader context. They certainly failed in their mission to preach the Gospel of the Good One, but that does not necessarily mean that Justin completely rejected everything they had said. Whether the allegorical explanations of Old Testament prophecies ascribed to him may be traced back to Justin himself or not, his position may have been that, to a certain extent, the message of Baruch was still hidden in the Jewish bible and only had to be excavated properly. As a matter of fact, it is in this vein that he interpreted the first chapters of Genesis.

In the second century, there was among the Christians a fierce debate about the meaning of the Hebrew bible. The Gnostic Christians were more radical in their rejection of the Old Testament or parts of it than their non-Gnostic co-religionists. But even those who rejected the Old Testament as inspired by the lower Demiurge, such as Marcion and the Gnostics, did not deny that it contained valuable portions. This question also played a

---

temptations of Jesus by Naas, one at the age of twelve, after his vocation, and the other at the age of thirty, in the desert, before his baptism. But these speculations have no support whatsoever in Hippolytus.

[44] The following is more or less a further elaboration, and to some extent a revision, of suggestions I already made in 1973 (*Studies in Gnosticism*, see note 5 above, 138-140).

role among the Jewish Christians. According to the *Gospel of the Nazoraeans*, Jesus said: "Even among the prophets after they were anointed with the Holy Spirit there was found a word of sin."[45] The Jewish-Christian debate on this point is also reflected in the Pseudo-Clementine idea of false pericopes in the Law of Moses and of 'female' prophecies in the Old Testament.[46] Interestingly, the *Homilies* teach that the male prophecies began with Adam, the first manifestation of the True Prophet, and that the female prophecies started with Eve. The male prophet speaks the truth, the female leads astray, *Hom.* III, 27, 1: ὁ ἄρσην ὅλος ἀλήθεια, ἡ θήλεια ὅλη πλάνη.[47] Justin does not speak about male and female prophecies nor does he trace them back to Adam and Eve, but also in his view there are two kinds of prophecy, which derive from the two male and female principles of the universe that were active in the creation of the world. Elohim inspires true prophecies through his angel Baruch and false prophecies derive from Edem through her angel Naas. Though Justin's view that all prophets before Jesus had been beguiled is more radical than the non-Gnostic Christians, gentile and Jewish alike, would have accepted, there is a close parallel between his views and those of the Jewish Christians. Another parallel between Justin and the Jewish Christians is that the latter also held that Jesus was the natural son of Joseph and Mary.[48]

The idea that Jesus was a prophet is part of the oldest layers of the Christian faith. The prophet Moses announced in Deuteronomy 18, 15 was already identified with Jesus in Acts 3, 22.[49] But that he was a prophet only, in fact the last and final prophet, was a tenet held by the Jewish Christians in particular. According to the *Gospel of the Hebrews* it happened

---

[45] For texts and commentary, see Klijn, *Jewish-Christian Gospel Tradition*, 105-107 (fragm. XXIV).

[46] Pseudo-Clement, *Homilies*, II, 38-52; Epiphanius, *Panarion*, 30, 18, 9 (Ebionites). On male and female prophecies, *Homilies*, III, 22-28; similar views were expressed by Elxai and his followers, cf. Epiphanius, *Panarion*, 19, 3, 6; Origen in Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.*, VI, 38.

[47] B. Rehm (ed.), *Die Pseudoklementinen*, I. *Homilien*, Berlin-Leipzig 1953, 66.

[48] Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, 48, 4; for the Christology of the Jewish Christians, see H.J. Schoeps, *Theologie und Geschichte des Judenchristentums*, Tübingen 1949, 70-116.

[49] According to Origen, *Contra Celsum* I, 57, Dositheus applied the same text to himself: "After the time of Jesus Dositheus the Samaritan also wanted to persuade the Samaritans that he was the Christ prophesied by Moses, and he appeared to have won over some folk to his teaching" (transl. H. Chadwick, *Origen. Contra Celsum*, Cambridge, 1953, repr. with corrections 1965, 52).

at the baptism of Jesus "that the whole fountain of the Spirit descended upon him and said to him: 'Son, I expected you among all the prophets and I would rest upon you. For you are my rest, you are my first-born Son, who shall reign in eternity'."[50] Though I do not suggest that Justin held exactly the same view, he certainly subscribed to the idea that Jesus fulfilled what had been expected from the earlier prophets. His idea of the successive missions of Baruch to Adam, Moses and the prophets is to a certain extent reminiscent of the Jewish-Christian idea of the successive manifestations of the True Prophet, which seems to have had a considerable influence on other religious movements in the Syro-Palestinian region as well. This idea is found in the Pseudo-Clementine writings, which cherish the idea that the True Prophet had manifested himself in such Old Testament figures as Adam, Abraham and Moses and finally appeared in the person of Jesus.[51] Elchasai, or at least his followers, also taught that Christ had appeared many times before his final incarnation.[52] Mani, who grew up in an Elkesaite community, included Jesus among the revealers of truth who had preceded him and reportedly considered himself the "seal of the prophets".[53] All this shows that Justin's idea that Moses and the Jewish prophets had been sent to proclaim the message finally preached

---

[50] Texts and commentary in Klijn, *Jewish-Christian Gospel Tradition*, 98-101 (fragm. XXI).

[51] See especially *Homilies* III, 20, 2 (ed. Rehm, 64): ὃς ἀπ' ἀρχῆς αἰῶνος ἅμα τοῖς ὀνόμασιν μορφὰς ἀλλάσσων τὸν αἰῶνα τρέχει μέχρις ὅτε ἰδίων χρόνων τυχών, διὰ τοὺς καμάτους θεοῦ ἐλέει χρισθείς, εἰς ἀεὶ ἔξει τὴν ἀνάπαυσιν. The relationship between Justin's Baruch and the True Prophet of the Pseudo-Clementines was also noticed by R. Reitzenstein, who, however, interpreted this as evidence of Iranian influences on Jewish and Christian thinking; cf. his *Das iranische Erlösungsmysterium*, Bonn 1921, 5, 99-104, and *Die hellenistischen Mysterienreligionen*, 3rd ed., Stuttgart 1927, reprinted Darmstadt 1956, 60, 243-245. Reitzenstein saw in Elohim's messenger Baruch a precursor of the Manichaean "Third Messenger", which is, however, extremely unlikely; see Marcovich, "Justin's Baruch," 114.

[52] Hippolytus, *Refutatio* IX, 14, 1; X, 29, 2.

[53] On Mani's forerunners, see e.g. *Kephalaia*, I, and the introduction to this chapter in I. Gardner, *The Kephalaia of the Teacher*, 15 (translation: 16-22); cf. also A. Böhlig, *Die Gnosis*, III, *Der Manichäismus*, Zürich-München, 1980, 23, 83, 155, and C. Colpe, *Das Siegel der Propheten. Historische Beziehungen zwischen Judentum., Judenchristentum, Heidentum und frühem Islam*, Berlin 1989, especially 15-37 ("Jesus und die Besiegelung der Prophetie") and 227-243 ("Mohammed und Mani als Prophetensiegel"), who points out that the attribution of the term 'Seal of the prophets' to Mani might be secondary, as a reaction to its earlier attribution to Mohammed.

by Jesus has its closest parallels in Jewish Christianity and some movements related to it.

The same observation can be made with respect to Justin's views on marriage, procreation and sexual sin. Marriage is the basic idea that holds the whole of Justin's system together. The marriage of Elohim and Edem is the starting point of the good creation of the world and man, and the marriage of Adam and Eve the God-willed beginning of the human race ("Increase and multiply, and inherit the earth"). According to Justin, there is nothing wrong with marriage and sexuality, as long as the latter is practised within wedlock. For the sins that are most strongly condemned are adultery and homosexuality, which had been introduced by Naas. Most Gnostic teachers rejected marriage and sexuality, although there were some notable exceptions.[54] But these never went as far as to prescribe marriage as a divine law. However, such prescriptions are frequently found in Jewish-Christian writings and in those of religious groups related to them, together with strong condemnations of all kinds of extra-marital sexual behaviour. The Pseudo-Clementines urge the presbyters to take care that all young people get married in due time, in order to preclude fornication. The first form of fornication is that a man does not have intercourse with his own wife and a woman not with her own husband.[55] The Elkesaites also strongly condemned extra-marital relationships and, therefore, "forced people to marry".[56] The Mandaeans also prescribed marriage and procreation and violently condemned sexual sins.[57] The Elkesaites were a Jewish Christian baptist sect; and also the Mandaeans, who were baptists too, had their roots in a Jewish milieu.

In view of the parallels mentioned above, it seems most probable that Justin started his career from a Jewish Christian background. He shared the ideas about Jesus, as the son of Joseph and Mary and the final prophet,

---

[54] See M.A. Williams, *Rethinking "Gnosticism". An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category*, Princeton 1996 (paperback 1999), 150-162.

[55] *Epistula Clementis ad Iacobum*, 7-8; Homiliae, III, 68; V, 25-26. Cf. also Epiphanius, *Panarion*, 30, 18, 2: "They force the young men into marriage at an early age."

[56] Epiphanius, *Panarion*, 19, 1, 7: ἀπεχθάνεται δὲ τῇ παρθενίᾳ, μισεῖ δὲ τὴν ἐγκράτειαν, ἀναγκάζει δὲ γαμεῖν.

[57] See K. Rudolph, *Die Mandäer*, I, Göttingen 1960, 85; also E.M. Yamauchi, *Gnostic Ethics and Mandaean Origins* (Harvard Theological Studies XXIV, Cambridge (Mass.) 1970, 35-52, who already drew attention to the related views of the Mandaeans and Justin: "Perhaps the closest correlation of the Mandaeans's attitude toward marriage is with the rather obscure Gnostic Justin" (52).

and about marriage and sexual sin, which were current among the Jewish Christians, the Elkesaites and the Manichaeans, and partly among the Mandaeans as well. But just as Elchasai and Mani, he developed a religious system of his own, which must have pushed him to the fringe of Jewish Christianity. He was apparently influenced by Gnostic ideas, but he did not go as far as to establish a sharp opposition between the Creator-God of the Jews and the Unknown God preached by Jesus. It is of interest to note that this aspect of Justin's thought was already thoroughly discussed in the middle of the 19th century. How Gnostic was Justin the Gnostic?

Richard Adelbert Lipsius (1830-1892) was the first scholar who drew attention to the relationship between Justin's ideas and those expressed in the Pseudo-Clementine writings. In 1860, he published an important study on Gnosticism,[58] in which he, *inter alia*, discussed the still vexing problem of what should be considered its most fundamental characteristic. Adolph Hilgenfeld (1823-1907) had argued that it was the separation of the Creator of the world from the supreme God, which found its most fundamental expression in the Gnostic degradation of the Jewish God to the position of the unknowing and bad Demiurge. Lipsius admitted that this might be true for the full-fledged Gnostic systems of the second century, but that it did not hold for the beginnings of Gnosticism.[59] In that connection, he discussed the position of Elohim in Justin's system and pointed out that in this case there was no question of a bad Demiurge or a bad creation. In Justin, just as in the Pseudo-Clementine writings, Christianity is identical with true Judaism, which can be found by excluding the false prophecies from the Old Testament. The message from Elohim to Jesus did not differ from that to Moses and the prophets. Nevertheless, Lipsius continued, there is no doubt that Justin was a Gnostic, for also in his system salvation can only be obtained through Gnosis. Elohim himself was for a long time completely unaware of the existence of the Good One. Only after he had seen the light of the Good One he was saved from his ignorance and began to rescue the spirit he had given to man.[60] From these considerations, Lipsius concluded that Justin's Gnosticism preceded, not in time but phenomenologically, that of the great Gnostic teachers: it is an authentic

[58] R.A. Lipsius, *Der Gnosticismus*, in J.S. Ersch & J.G. Gruber (eds.), *Allgemeine Encyklopädie der Wissenschaften und Künste*, Erste Sektion. A-G. Theil 71, 223-304.

[59] Lipsius, *Gnosticismus*, 253-257.

[60] Lipsius, *Gnosticismus*, 255: "Elohim ist der Ersterlöste und der Erlöser zugleich."

Gnosticism, but its Demiurge is not yet the expression of a deep rift between Judaism and Christianity. Therefore, the book of *Baruch* should not be seen as a mixture of mature Gnosticism and Jewish Christianity but as the transition of the latter into the former.[61]

Lipsius was on the right scent, but he saw Justin so much as an example of the assumed historical development of Gnosticism out of Jewish Christianity that he seems to have underestimated the similarities between Justin's ideas and the Gnostic systems of the second century.[62] Characteristic features of these systems, such as the Creator's ignorance of the supreme God, the salvation of the divine spirit from the world of matter, its obstruction by evil powers, the emphasis on Gnosis as the only means of salvation, also constitute the framework of Justin's myth. It is almost inconceivable that he had no knowledge of the general structure of what Williams has called the 'biblical demiurgical traditions'.[63] But it seems that the influence of his Jewish-Christian background was so great that he felt himself obliged to construct a myth of his own, which retained the basic Jewish idea that the Creator and his creation were fundamentally good. This premise led him to a subtle and at the same time ambiguous explanation of how evil came into the world. Elohim was good, but he lacked the faculty of foreknowledge and, therefore, could not foresee that his ascent to the Good One would entail the origin of evil. His Gnostic inclinations compelled Justin to a radical reinterpretation of Jewish religious history, but as a Christian he stuck to the belief that Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth, had brought the final revelation.

Donkerstraat 7
4119 LX Ravenswaaij
The Netherlands
E-mail: broekrav@hetnet.nl

[61] Lipsius, *Gnosticismus*, 255: "Das Buch bezeichnet vielmehr den Übergang des Judenchristenthums in die Gnosis."

[62] Hilgenfeld, in his turn, underestimated the differences. In his view, Justin's system was "nicht der Anfang, sondern eher der Ausgang der ophitischen Gnosis"; cf. H. Hilgenfeld, *Die Ketzergeschichte des Urchristentums, urkundlich dargestellt*, Leipzig 1884 (reprinted Darmstadt 1963), 270-277.

[63] Williams, *Rethinking "Gnosticism"*, 51-53, and passim.